



How Do You Choose a Church?

How do you navigate the process of selecting a new church? Do you listen to a few sermons, check out the programs in the youth ministry, review the doctrinal statement, or just visit and see what the people are like? Or do you look for something in particular, like a focus on missions or evangelism, a certain type of music for worship, or an emphasis on relationships and community? Maybe you have become disenchanted with the church, and are not convinced that commitment to a particular local church is relevant to your relationship with God.

We all come with expectations of what the local church should be, and we all believe those expectations are important. But should our expectations be the priority for the church? Often with good intentions, churches try to guide and grow ministry through human means such as programs, tradition, business-like goals, popular trends and movements, or the personalities and notions of a few individuals. Unsurprisingly, this lays a weak foundation for the church. Building on human ideas instead of the timeless spiritual principles of Scripture will always lead to pragmatism, ineffectiveness, and eventual failure to fulfill God's intended purposes for the Church.

It does not have to be this way. In His Word, God has made clear what He expects from His people, giving us sure and certain standards for building effective ministry and recognizing a church where God is clearly at work. It begins through understanding our role and God's role in the life and growth of the church. In Matthew 16:13-20, the Lord promises, "I will build My Church", and in John 6:35-40, Christ makes clear that He loses none that the Father gives Him. Summed up simply, Jesus Christ is the only Lord and Head of the Church. He adds to it, protects it, and as Revelation chapters two and three make clear, He actively oversees and prunes it as He sees fit. Our role is explained in Titus 1:3, 5. We are to "set in order" the local church. We are to order our structure, mission, and practices according to all of the instruction we have been given in Scripture. We are to bring our theology, our thoughts, our desires, and our wills under the clear direction of God's Word.

The Practical Value of a Biblical Philosophy of Ministry

Any good church wants to be biblical in its approach to ministry and church life, but sometimes there isn't a clear and unified understanding of what that should look like. One action a church can take to help guide them toward biblical faithfulness and unity in all that they do is to develop what is called a "philosophy of ministry". A philosophy of ministry is a set of foundational values that spell out "why we do what we do" as a local church. These values are drawn from clear biblical principle, and from them we find the

basis for our leadership, direction for ministry and worship, and our foundation for life in the church. A sound philosophy of ministry will help to unify a church because it is greater than the will or priorities of any one person or group, or the popular but fleeting wisdom of the times. It can guide the church to sound decisions, and even help the leadership to decide which ministry opportunities should be embraced, and which ones would distract the church from its main mission.

Without a biblical philosophy of ministry, a church will have no lasting certainty about what its mission and practices should be. When the inevitable pressures and dangers come, the church is given to instability, compromise, and dissension.

The Philosophy of Ministry of Saving Grace Bible Church

What is the philosophy of ministry of Saving Grace Bible Church? Our aim is to present everyone complete in Christ through the exaltation of God, the exposition of the Scriptures, the edification of the saints, and the evangelization of the lost. These are our priorities, because we are convinced from the Scriptures that Jesus expects us to honor and pursue these commitments.

We have written this brief booklet to help you evaluate this ministry from the same perspective that Christ Himself evaluates it- which is simple faithfulness to the instructions He has given in His Word. But what do we really mean by what we say? What follows is a deeper explanation of what this philosophy of ministry looks like when it is lived out in the church. Read it, and you'll not only understand the values we cherish, but also clearly see the direction that Saving Grace Bible Church is headed.

Principle #1: The Exaltation of God

The exaltation of God flows from a high view of God, as we esteem Him rightly for the greatness of His attributes and works, and as we come to grips with His incomprehensibility. As theologians would say it is to reflect on the "Godness" of God and to be transformed by that inspection. To exalt God is to worship Him exclusively, and to honor Him by bowing our knee to His authority, keeping His commandments no matter what the circumstances of our lives may be. It is the manifest result of a life that pursues humble obedience to God, and is the natural expression of faith lived out, since faith is the assurance of things hoped for and the conviction of things not seen (Hebrews 11:1). Therefore to exalt God is to believe His promises and commands and act upon them, knowing that our reward will come from Him, and to believe His Word and humbly submit to it even if at the outset we doubt it can work (1 Corinthians 10:13). In this God is glorified because we will bear much fruit (John 15:8). In short, we seek to exalt Him by taking up our cross and following Him as true disciples (Matthew 16:24). We believe that the result of an exalted view of God produces a strong and abiding faith that is marked by clarity in our understanding of the Scriptures and confidence in its power, a right perspective on our circumstances, and vitality in our church life.

A Clear Understanding of the Teaching of the Scriptures

Encouraging great faith in the people of the local church begins by skillfully opening the Word to reveal the grandness of God in His very existence, nature, and power. Psalm 145:3 says that "His greatness is unsearchable" and Isaiah 55:8-9 says that as the

heavens are higher than the earth, so are God's ways and thoughts higher than our own. From beginning to end, Scripture proclaims that the God of heaven and earth is awesome and utterly unique. He exists in eternity, free of all limitations of space and time. His understanding is infinite (Psalm 147:5). He is eternally God, with no beginning or end (Psalm 90:2). His Word stands forever; no one has been His teacher, and His Word is not diminished over time (Isaiah 40:8, 12-31). If we were to question such a majestic God in any way, the briefest of looks at the power of His works and wisdom would cause us to close our mouths like Job, and open them again only to offer praise and worship (Job 40:1-14).

A Greater Confidence in His Word

God's Word is objective truth that demands a response. He demonstrates His greatness in our lives by calling us to be obedient to Jesus Christ, thus God expects all of us to come under His authority. So how does the truth of Christ's Lordship impact the way that we handle His Word? First, it means that our dependence must be in the clear and faithful proclamation of the Gospel to convert and transform hearts (Romans 1:16) rather than the cleverness of our own methods. Second, it means that we must rely on God's Word not only to convert unbelieving hearts, but also to strengthen, mature, and unify believers. In 2 Timothy 1:13-14, the Apostle Paul told Timothy to "retain the standard of sound words" and to "guard, through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, the treasure which has been entrusted to you". The job of a faithful teacher and preacher is to boldly, patiently, and skillfully present the truth, trusting that the same powerful truths that convert a man's heart are also able to equip him and make him useful for the Lord's service in the church (2 Timothy 3:16-17). When we have an exalted view of God, we believe that He is able to speak clearly and powerfully through His Word to transform the hearts of all mankind. Therefore we demonstrate our commitment to honoring God by making sure that we understand every Word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.

A Right Perspective in our World View

A high view of God builds the local church, edifies its people, and uplifts worship. It brings order and sweetness to the life and fellowship of the church. It leads to a high view of His Word, which gives us an appropriate basis for encouragement, and the right message to proclaim to a lost and dying world. A high view of God orders the life of the Christian by bringing maturity to the saint, and adorning him with godly wisdom that puts the circumstances of life in proper perspective. A right view of God leads us to see that He accomplishes all things for His glory and causes us to look at life's circumstances and say as Joseph did in Genesis 50:20, "You meant it for evil but God meant it for good." A right view of God gives us hope in the midst of pain and suffering (1 John 3:3). This hope gives us the strength to persevere even through the darkest of hours.

Vitality in our Church Life

When we are intentional about seeing God exalted in our hearts and in our midst, our faith always grows stronger. It produces a holy fear of God, a contrite pursuit of the truth, profound worship, and vitality in all that the church does. When a church has a low view of God, its faith is weakened. It encourages a selfish and shallow pursuit of its own comfort (Romans 3:18), robbing God of worship and robbing the people of discernment, fellowship, and sanctification.

Our view of God is elevated when we consider His revelation of Himself to Israel in Exodus 20, as He descended on Sinai and gave His Law to Moses. His Law reflects His perfection, and commands worship of the Lord alone. The effect of God's unique presence was terrifying to the people of Israel. They trembled and begged Moses, "speak to us yourself and we will listen; but let not God speak to us, or we will die." So much is on display here that contrasts God's power and goodness with man's frailness and evil, but it thrills the contrite soul that when God chose to reveal Himself, that He chose to reveal His nature to forgive and to save.

To sum it up simply: a church with a big God has little problems, but a church with a little God has big problems.

Principle #2: The Exposition of the Scriptures

To exposit the Word of God, one must practice drawing out the meaning of the text. We believe that the Author's original intent is the primary meaning of the Scriptures, and that this one intended meaning is found by using a Literal, Historical, Grammatical method of interpretation. The Scriptures must be handled this way because we are commanded to accurately handle the Word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15), and by doing this work the Man of God is adequately equipped for every good deed (2 Timothy 3:17) and is prepared for everything pertaining to life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3). It is through the faithful exposition of the Word of God that His people are saved (1 Peter 1:23) and are sanctified (John 17:17). The Literal, Historical, Grammatical method of interpretation was practiced by Jesus Christ (Matthew 4:1-10) and is a proper response to objective revelation from God Himself. The Word of God is authoritative because it comes directly from God (2 Timothy 3:16), therefore we exposit the Word of God in order to make His authoritative message known to all mankind. Since every church in America would admit to expositing or teaching the Scriptures, we look for marked evidence of the proclamation of God's Word.

A Church's Life and Practices Reveal its View of the Word of God

If you want to know what regard a church has for the Word of God, listen to the man in the pulpit. Does he make clear declarative statements that are drawn from the Scriptures? If the pastor's confidence is in the transforming power of the Word of God, he will spend his time carefully teaching his people the implications of the whole counsel of God, and he will preach in a manner that demands a response from the hearts of his hearers.

A church's regard for God's Word is also revealed by its prevailing attitudes toward how the Scriptures speak to their sin and the circumstances of their lives. Is there mere external commitment to obedience to Christ, and is the frailty of the flesh used as an excuse for sin? Or do they lovingly encourage one another to obedience and to flee from temptations (1 Corinthians 10:13)? Is there a selfish and immature belief that no one could possibly understand their plight and therefore that no one has the right to counsel them as to how they should respond and what they should do? Or do they recognize that the Scripture pierces through to our innermost thoughts and attitudes and speaks to all men in every condition and circumstance of life (Hebrews 4:12-13)?

You can also watch how a church applies the Word of God when difficulties and trials inevitably come. Is it marked by a lack of confidence in God's Word, and over-reliance on human wisdom such as psychology, personal intuition, business practices, or the whims of popular culture? Where there is only a superficial confidence in God's Word, the wisdom of the world prevails. Is it marked by hypocrisy and a lack of desire to know and embrace the Word of God? Where there is lack of desire for the knowledge of God, spiritual immaturity flourishes (1 Peter 2:1-3).

A Church's Leaders Reveal its View of the Word of God

If you want to know what regard a church has for the Word of God, look at its foundation for leadership. Leadership in the local church is sometimes founded on personalities, academic credentials, business experience, or even dominated by a particularly influential family or families. In contrast, a church that is reliant on the Word of God founds its leadership on godly character evidenced in a plurality of men. Its leaders are to exemplify it. In the list of qualifications for leadership in the church in 1 Timothy 3:1-8, the only talent mentioned is the ability to teach; the rest all have to do with godly character. Why is the character of a leader more important than his talents or credentials? Because God is the only one who can produce godly character (Galatians 5:19-25), and character gives evidence of a life that is submitted to the revealed will of Christ in His Word.

A Church's Source of Revelation Reveals its View of the Word of God

If you want to know what regard a church has for the Word of God, observe where it goes for wisdom and knowledge. A church may declare its devotion to the Word of God, yet impose its own pre-supposed views on the Scripture, or even seek extra-biblical revelation instead of letting the Scripture speak for itself. The only trustworthy source for specific knowledge and direction from God is in the sixty-six books of the Bible. This is how God has chosen to reveal Himself most fully, and this is why a church that is reliant on the Word of God will trust completely in its power to transform (2 Timothy 3:16-17), will demand that its preachers and teachers work diligently to accurately handle the Word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15), and will understand that the real evidence of discipleship is continuing in Christ's Word (John 8:31-32).

Because we understand that the Scriptures are the means through which God transforms our hearts, we believe that it is best to handle the Word of God *exegetically*, meaning that we are to draw God's intended meaning out of the text rather than reading our own ideas and presuppositions into the text. This is why we hold to a Literal, Grammatical, Historical interpretation of Scripture. We believe that it is meant to be understood literally where the plain meaning is understandable; grammatically, in that we translate from the original languages and their unique grammatical constructions when seeking to resolve any seeming lack of clarity; and historically, in that we seek to know the pertinent historical background and original recipients of the letter to help us more fully grasp the meaning and implications to that original audience. Our goal with this method of interpretation is to reveal the mind of God, and it is our method to teach verse-by-verse through the Scripture in order to expose our minds to the whole counsel of God.

We understand that Satan tries to twist the Scriptures to misrepresent the truth (Luke 4:10-11). Therefore to expose this satanic work we believe that all Scripture is inspired by God and must be rightly interpreted in its context. We believe that if this is done faithfully, there will be no contradictions and the result will be perfect harmony in the full counsel of God. For this reason we believe that the doctrine of the Harmony of Scriptures teaches a checking principle, not an interpreting principle. That is, we do not use Paul's instruction on faith (Rom 4:1-5) to tell James (James 2:14-26) what he means by faith or vice versa. Instead we seek to understand each passage in its context and then compare the meaning. When we do this, we find that Paul speaks of faith in relationship to salvation while James speaks of faith in relationship to sanctification. Thus the apparent contradiction is explained by a clearer understanding of faith as the Scriptures reveal it.

To sum it up simply: we do not have the right to tell the Bible what it means, but rather we are held accountable by God to rightly divide it.

Principle #3: The Edification of the Saints

One of the many gifts of God's grace to His redeemed people is the Church. In the Church, God's people find the help and encouragement to persevere in godliness. When Christ poured out His gifts upon the Church, He gave some as Pastors, Teachers, and Evangelists for the equipping of the Saints for the work of the ministry (Ephesians 4:11-13). This work of the ministry is strengthened as the people of God grow in their spiritual lives. This spiritual growth is encouraged by continual exercise of our spiritual gifts, and the use of our gifts leads to the edifying of the saints.

A Faithful Church is Committed to Edifying the Saints

What does it mean to "edify"? The Greek word that is used in the New Testament is "oikodome", and it means "to build up". In 1 Thessalonians 5:11, Paul exhorts his readers: *"For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep, we will live together with Him. Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing."*

So how are we to edify one another? Many think that building up others means improving their self-esteem, but this is not at all what Paul means. Every problem a Christian faces is essentially a theology problem. We're built up as we come to greater understanding and submission to the truth of God revealed in His Word.

We are Edified by a Right Perspective of Ourselves

Man represents God in his physical nature, earthly dominion, moral actions, rational decisions, relational interactions, and perpetual existence. Though separated from God because of sin, what unites us all is that we have been created in God's image. What is so edifying about this truth? Consider just a few of its implications: Because we are made in His image: 1) God can rightly define man's needs. He is our Creator and He knows us intimately, far better in fact than we know ourselves. 2) Man is dependent upon God. The One who created you is the only One who can truly provide for you. 3) How we treat others reflects our treatment of God. This truth dismantles and destroys our sinful and prideful tendency to reserve the "right" to ourselves to despise or mistreat

one another. When we view God as the center of the universe and ourselves as servants of the most high, then we are in position to be built up for God's glory.

We are Edified by Right Convictions

When our first parents gave in to temptation, it was nothing less than open rebellion against the sovereign God of all creation. It resulted in spiritual death, and its effects were devastating and complete. While not every man is as evil and corrupt as he could be, his depravity is total in that there is no part of him that is not tainted and warped by sin, and therefore no man can commend himself to God (Romans 3:10-20).

Understanding this truth informs us of the real need of every man. When we understand our needs correctly we can then seek the right remedy. The believer is remedied by Jesus Christ. When we are found in Christ we are no longer our own. We now live for Jesus Christ (Galatians 2:20).

We are Edified by a Right Walk Before God

As we consider our sin, nothing so thrills the heart as knowing that God in His grace has provided a remedy for our sin in the death and resurrection of His Son. What we sometimes forget is that we need to continually refresh ourselves in the truth of the Gospel. Looking on the cross reminds us of the terrible cost of sin, and the incredible riches of God's grace. This magnificent salvation involves every member of the Trinity. It is from the Father, through the Son, and by the Spirit (Titus 3:4-6). It is the special work of the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, and salvation is found in no one else (Acts 4:12). This salvation is utterly thorough and complete. It redeems all of a man, breathing life into his dead spirit, making him into a new creation, and promising to one day redeem his body as well (Romans 8:23). Its judicial and moral effects take away all of the sins of the believer (Hebrews 9:23-28), and through Christ we have God's forgiveness now and forever. Such a comprehensive salvation produces adoration of the Lord of glory, and a humble gratitude that so great a God has stooped to forgive and save so wicked a sinner. This new and transformed life leads to walking in righteousness just as He is righteous (1 John 2:29).

As we abide in Jesus Christ we wait for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ to take us to Himself. Because we have this hope, we purify ourselves just as He is pure (1 John 3:3). The mutual edification in the Body of Christ comes as we encourage each other to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord (Colossians 1:10).

We are Edified by a Right Understanding of Man's Transformation

Salvation is more than a mental assent to the Gospel. It is a conversion that leads to a fundamental change of the whole life, and involves a complete transformation of a person's existence under the influence of the Holy Spirit (Acts 26:20). It is the new birth, the second birth, which is not the result of human experience or effort but is distinctly the work of God. Knowing that God is the sole Author of his salvation, and that there is nothing a man can do to contribute to it gives great confidence and comfort to the believer that he is secure in God's grasp. We have been born again by the power of God (1 John 2:29; Ephesians 2:5; John 1:11-12; Colossians 2:13). As a result of this work of God He holds us and protects us by His power (1 Peter 1:5).

We are Edified by a Right Understanding of Man's Maturation

When redeemed by God and born again, a believer is immediately justified and forgiven of his sin. He is sanctified or “set apart” by God and begins his course as a Christian (Colossians 3:12). Though already sanctified in the sense of being fully justified and forgiven, he is also progressively sanctified from sin as his life increasingly moves toward a moral conformity to the image of Christ (John 17:17). Future sanctification is revealed in God’s promises of our being perfected in eternity. 1 John 3:1-3 says that when Christ appears that we shall be like Him, and so whoever has this hope purifies himself just as Christ is pure. Understanding God’s sure and certain work to perfect us in Christ gives hope as we struggle with our sin and frailties. As we seek to live a sanctified life, we encourage each other to faithfulness and hold each other to God’s holy standard (Hebrews 10:23-24; Galatians 6:1-3).

To sum it up simply: The Christian life is filled with exhortation and encouragement to help us live like God’s children today.

Principle #4: The Evangelization of the Lost

The wonderful work and power of God is on display each and every time a sinner responds to the Gospel. We uphold the proclamation of a simple gospel. We teach, “if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead you shall be saved (Romans 10:9-10).” Everyone who confesses and turns to Christ will be received by Him (John 6:37), and everyone who is received by Him has been made into a new creation and will live a new and transformed life (2 Corinthians 5:17-21).

We Have Been Left Here to Proclaim Christ

The Church is built on the truth of Christ, it is sanctified by the truth of Christ, and it is called to give a defense of the life transforming work of Christ and call all men to repent and believe the Gospel. Some may be particularly gifted to do the work of evangelism, but every Christian is commanded to share in this privilege (Matthew 28:18-20). This is why the Church has been left here on earth.

Jesus called us to make disciples. This isn’t “close the deal and pray the prayer” evangelism. This is life on life, patiently and faithfully sharing the truth and looking for and expecting evident life transformation (Romans 6:1-14). The very truth that we are to proclaim is also our motivation for witnessing. Jesus rules over all. He has authority over all, and this coming King is the only solution for the most urgent problem facing every human being who has ever lived (Acts 4:12, Philippians 2:9-11).

God Works through His Word to Save

The parable of the soils in the Gospel of Mark is about a sower casting seed into various types of soils, and it is meant to convey the truth about how people come in to the Kingdom of God. Entrance into the Kingdom hinges on a person’s ultimate response to the Gospel: do they value Christ more than the world? The evidence of a redeemed heart is the production of spiritual fruit and lasting faithfulness to Christ.

It is not in the persuasiveness and skill of the sower, his timing, or even anything in the person who hears. Belief in Christ is the work of God, not of man (John 6:28-29). This is why Jesus said to His disciples in Mark 4:11-12 that God had given them the gift of understanding the mystery of the Kingdom of God, while those outside the Kingdom get everything in parables. Everyone who comes to saving faith is first drawn by the Father (John 6:44), and they are kept secure in their faith by Christ (John 6:37). We will harvest, we just need to cast the seed faithfully and protect our crops from predators. The casting is ours, the results belong to God.

We are to Defend the Faith

“Apologia” is a Greek word that means “to give an answer”, or “to speak in defense of”. It is a vindication of the Christian faith against opposing philosophies, and we are commanded to make that defense (Jude 3). How are we to defend the faith? Christian apologetics is both a negative defense and a positive offensive effort, and it is an argument made squarely on biblical grounds, appealing to the authority of the Word of God. It is not the building of a foundation upon reason for faith to sit, but rather is building a witness to the truth of Christianity based on rational biblical thinking and reasoning. 1 Peter 3:15 adds that we must sanctify Christ as Lord in our hearts before an adequate defense can be made. We must be living in obedient and loving relationship with Him so that He is truly Lord of our reason and intellect. Being fully prepared in our mind and heart, proclaiming our witness in an attitude of meekness and fear and with a good conscience (2 Timothy 2:24-26), knowing that the Lord stands with us (2 Timothy 4:16-17), we can defend the faith with confidence.

Be Clear, and be Prepared for Rejection

Like Paul on Mars Hill in Athens, we can use the natural desires of our hearers to raise questions about God, but our argument must pre-suppose the God of the Bible and every man’s accountability to Him. We must make an unapologetic defense of the one true God, even knowing that we may well be rejected. Because there is no middle ground with Christ and His Gospel, our presentation of Christ must be clear enough for someone to either accept or reject Him. Jesus does not disappoint; therefore we are careful to present Christ and His Gospel in their glorious fullness.

To sum it up simply: There are two religions in the world, the religion of Divine achievement and the religion of human achievement. We proclaim the work of God which saves man from his sin.

Conclusion

Here’s a quick summation of our philosophy of ministry:

- Saving Grace Bible Church exists to exalt God. In humble recognition of this truth, we acknowledge that it is not “our church” to build. Christ will build His Church; our aim is to order our lives and this church in faithful accordance with His instruction.
- Saving Grace Bible Church practices verse-by-verse exposition of the Scriptures. Our confidence is in the sanctifying power of the Word of God; therefore we strive to know the mind of God, not the wisdom or opinions of men.

- Saving Grace Bible Church gathers to edify the saints. We build up one another by shepherding and caring for one another with the truth that leads to the esteem of Christ, and ultimately to our mutual growth in love, obedience, and fruitfulness.
- Saving Grace Bible Church reaches out to evangelize the lost. Our confident witness is the Gospel of Jesus Christ proclaimed with our mouths, and borne out in lives transformed by His grace.

This is the philosophy of ministry of Saving Grace Bible Church. Our hope is that this booklet has been helpful to you in understanding our purposes and priorities. We invite you to join us as we seek to present every man complete in Christ!

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